

Live Oak Creamery  
88 Martin Street  
Gilroy  
Santa Clara County  
California

HABS No. CA-2065

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CAL,  
43-GIL,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Architectural and Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS NO. CA-2065

## LIVE OAK CREAMERY

Location:

88 Martin Street (between Railroad Street and the Southern Pacific Railroad Tracks). Gilroy, Santa Clara County, California.

USGS Gilroy Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates 10.627500.4096560.

Present Owner  
and Occupant:

Mr. and Mrs. Eugene F. Sachara  
(Note: Residence is 1160 Third Street, Gilroy)

Present Use:

Woodworking shop.

Significance:

The Live Oak Creamery is significant, as it was the first butter factory established in Gilroy in 1908. This plain brick building is also unique as the only insulated structure in the area. In the 1920s and 1930s cheese was processed here. The building now stands as a symbol of the time when the dairy business was a major industry in the Gilroy area.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1908. The Gilroy Advocate newspaper reported that on January 18, 1908, "Colonel O. E. Learnard purchased a lot at Railroad and Martin Streets ... and will shortly erect a modern creamery building." On April 4, 1908, the same newspaper said that "Learnard's new creamery has been completed and the first batch of butter was made on March 30, 1908."
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

Book 326, page 439. January 30, 1908. James M. White to O. E. Learnard. The sum of \$500. "South line of Martin Street with the westerly line of Railroad Street 100 feet west 61 feet to the east, line of Southern Pacific Railroad Company, thence north 100 feet to southerly line of Martin Street. Lot 12 in Block 1, North, Range 1 East together with all and singular the tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances belonging.

Book 401, page 6. March 7, 1913 (settlement of the estate of Colonel Oscar E. Learnard, who died November 6, 1911, in Kansas). Mary Learnard, his wife, received a "parcel of land on Martin Street where it intersected the westerly line of Railroad Street, measuring 100 feet x 61 feet."

Through an investigation of the tax assessment rolls and recorded deeds it is possible to trace the owners after Mary A. Learnard. 1921-25, Garlock and Crook (the former manager, Garlock probably bought from Mary A. Learnard).

1925-1927,

Grantor: Oliver and Annie L. Crook.

Grantees: Pete, Quinto, Alessio and Walter Luchessa. Bought the above described parcel of land.

1927-1945, Luchessa Brothers.

In 1945 the Creamery and later cheese factory ceased serving these functions. Since then, a series of owners have used it for an electrician's shop, a "loan shark's office", a laundromat and a Jehova Witness's Hall.

Book C, page 71, November 2, 1976.

Grantors: Anthony Coletto and Leo Ludwig

Grantees: Mr. Eugene and Mrs. Betty Sachara.

The building is partially being used for the crafting of spinning wheels.

4. Notes on original plan and construction: None known.
5. Additions: The tax assessment books indicate a big increase from 1918-1919 - 1920 as follows:  
1918-1919, Lot value: \$220; Improvements: \$720  
1919-1920, Lot value: \$700; Improvements: \$1800  
This was the time when the Learnard family had hired William R. Garlock. "Garlock, local manager for the Live Oak Creamery, recently in from San Jose, is making improvements." It is possible that the board and batten addition with the monitor roof was constructed at that time. Also, the insulation in the refrigerator room could have been added at this time. For this installation double-hung sash windows were covered up, as well as a door. The location of the former refrigerator door is still visible in the south wall of this room.

The next big jump in assessments occurs in 1930-1931 as follows:

1929-1930, Lot value: \$630; Improvements: \$1620

1930-1931, Lot value: \$3000; Improvements: \$2500

This could be the time when the testing laboratory and retail store were added. Louise Berri, a Luchessa family member, recalls the cheese factory vividly. She said that the existing building was

there in the early 1930s except for the office which was added by the subsequent owner in the late 1940s.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The Live Oak Creamery was built by the Learnards, a prominent family in the Gilroy area. Colonel O. E. Learnard, upon retiring from the first Kansas Regiment had migrated to California, where he gained a reputation as one of the leading journalists in the state. He also owned approximately 1,000 acres of farm land about four miles west of Gilroy in the Solis district. The Colonel's son, Tracey, was involved in the dairy business. The Learnards recognized that the dairy farmers in the area were shipping all their cream to other locations to be made into butter and realized that it would be more practical and economical to have a creamery in the Gilroy area. Therefore, "Tracey Learnard established a creamery at his place west of Gilroy where butter is manufactured daily for market," (Gilroy Advocate, December 28, 1907, no page.) under the "Live Oak" brand name. The creamery had the most modern equipment and machinery, which was fully described in a Gilroy newspaper.

"The advancement of the age is shown as much probably by the methods in dairying as in anything else. If the dairymen who died thirty years ago could return to earth, they would be unable to understand the way things are being done. In these days, as soon as the milking is done the big cans are carried while yet the milk is warm to the "Separator room" where the machinery, revolving at a high rate of speed, separates the heavier particles--the cream fats--from the milk, delivering the two fluids into different cans. The cream is then put away to ripen when the churning and butter making is also done by machinery. It is done thoroughly, expeditiously and with more attention to sanitary details than formerly."

Gilroy Gazette. December 20, 1907, page 12.

Another Gilroy newspaper heralded this new business enterprise with headlines of "New Industry Started for Gilroy--Long Felt Want Has Been Supplied At Last... A Creamery At Home Will Bring Dollars To The Land." (Gilroy Gazette. March 29, 1907, page 4.)

At about the same time Colonel Learnard purchased the parcel of land in Gilroy at Martin and Railroad Streets and commenced building the Live Oak Creamery, the other creamery in Solis was closed. The reasons for building the creamery in town were not mentioned, but it could be because of a more accessible location, and/or the spur track of the Southern Pacific Railroad, which was adjacent to the property. The new "Live Oak Creamery" had the capacity of manufacturing 1,000 pounds of butter per day. In 1912, Colonel Learnard died and left the Live Oak Creamery to his wife, Mary. Tracey continued to manage the creamery for several years. In 1917,

William Garlock, lately of San Jose, was hired to manage the creamery. In 1922 Tracey was to become Postmaster of Gilroy, a position that he held for some time and that was considered "one of the most important post offices in the coast counties." - (Gilroy Advocate, March 28, 1930.) Business must have been flourishing for the Live Oak Creamery, as Garlock installed the latest pasteurizer and homogenizer in 1919. At this time, the dairy industry was listed as the first and foremost among the businesses in Gilroy, the cows bringing their owners an estimated \$150,000 annually. (Gilroy Dispatch, December 21, 1970, no page number.) It appears that the Live Oak Creamery was the only creamery in town. This is substantiated by the fact that "profit also came to the small dairymen through a creamery erected in town during the 1900s." (Gilroy Dispatch, op. cit.).

As noted previously, Garlock & Crook purchased the Live Oak Creamery from Mary Learnard in 1920--1921. If the tax assessment records are accurate, Garlock sold his interest to Crook in 1924-1925. In the early 1920s the Live Oak Creamery started making cheese, too. For this purpose, Walter Luchessa, who had been trained as a cheese maker in his native Switzerland and had immigrated to the Gilroy area in 1919, was hired.

In 1925, Walter together with his three brothers, Peter, Alessio and Quinto, bought the factory from Crook. Walter ran the business, and the other brothers were investors. Butter and cream production was stopped. A descendant of the Luchessas described how the cheese factory worked. The milk cans were delivered to the testing room, a highly secretive place where only the chemist was allowed. Each patron was given a number to insure fairness in evaluating their cream. The more butter fat content, the higher the price. The milk was then brewed in the processing room with its three huge copper-lined vats. Large wooden rakes were used to stir up the rennet mixture. After the cheese was processed, the residue of whey was very much in demand by farmers, who bought it for feeding their hogs.

In the next processing room, cheese cloth, wax and the date were added, and the cheese was then stacked and rotated daily for the aging process. For the final aging phase the finished products were placed in the refrigeration room. Monterey Jack and cheddar cheese were made by the Luchessas. The cheese was sold in a five pound loaf or a 24 pound flat piece. With the train spur from the Southern Pacific Railroad, the cheeses were then loaded directly onto the railroad cars for distribution in California. For the whole business, there were only three employees.

In the mid-1930s, the Luchessas rented the cheese factory to the Zottola Bros., who carried on the business. The Zottolas had a retail store where cheese, butter and cream were sold. In 1935 Palmer and Ernest Zottola, the proprietors, made some improvements.

"In addition to remodeling the cheese room, the building has been painted inside and out and other improvements made." (Gilroy Advocate, June 7, 1935, page 2.) The Zottola Bros. made Monterey Jack, full cream cheese and granular cheese, which was distributed to "San Francisco, Los Angeles, Fresno and Bakersfield, where they have established markets for Gilroy cheese." (Gilroy Advocate, June 7, 1935, op. cit.).

Due to stricter state regulations of the moisture content of cheese, the Zottola Bros. ceased functioning about 1940. The Luchessa descendants said that the Zottola Bros. were the last cheese makers to close in Gilroy, thereby ending a viable business, which had started in the 1850s. Gilroy had once been known as the cheese capital of the State. (Gilroy Dispatch, December 21, 1970, no page.) The absence of alkali in the water supply aided the cheese maker in this area, as it was not necessary to heat the milk to a high temperature of 160 degrees, to rid the milk of the alkali. This heating process impaired the quality of the cheese.

In 1895 cheese was the main product of Gilroy. "The succulent grasses which flourish along the creeks and in the lowlands having early brought about the development of the industry." (Santa Clara County and Its Resources. San Jose: Mercury, 1895, page 57.) At this time, Gilroy was processing about one-fifth of the State's cheese, amounting to 1,300,000 pounds per year. The Live Oak Creamery today stands as a reminder of the times when the dairy and cheese industries were the mainstays of the economy of the Gilroy area.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Gilroy Tax Assessment Books, 1907-1946, Gilroy Historical Museum, 195 Fifth Street, Gilroy, California.

Sanborn Map, Sanborn Publishing Company, New York, N.Y., Map of 1925 updated to 1959 at San Jose Historical Museum, 635 Phelan Avenue, San Jose, California.  
Santa Clara County Records Office, Deeds, 70 West Hedding Street, San Jose, California.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Gilroy's First Century (1870-1970), Published by the City of Gilroy, California, 1970.

Santa Clara County Directories, 1905-1955.

Santa Clara County and Its Resources. San Jose, CA.: San Jose Mercury, 1985.

c. Newspapers:

Gilroy Advocate. Dec. 28, 1907, Jan. 18, 1908, April 4, 1908, March 10, 1917, March 28, 1930, January 8, 1932, June 7, 1935.

Gilroy Dispatch - Centennial Issue, Dec. 21, 1970.  
Yesteryears Columns, January 19 and April 5, 1968.

Gilroy Gazette, March 29, 1907 (no page) and December 20, 1907, p. 12.

d. Interviews:

Mrs. Betty Sachara, owner at the Live Oak Creamery.

Louise Berri. Talked to on the telephone (408-842-5075) numerous times in July and August in Gilroy. She is a Luchessa descendant, who was familiar with the cheese factory from her early childhood and worked both for her uncle and later for the Zottolas.

Prepared by Sibyl McCormac Groff  
Supervisor  
Santa Clara County HABS Team  
Summer 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This manufacturing structure represents the most important early industry of Gilroy.
2. Condition of fabric: Original brick portion: the walls show considerable deterioration of the mortar and deterioration of the brick. Roof: burnt and rotted trusses are covered with little sheathing. Fair/Poor condition. Addition: stuccoed frame additions are in good condition showing little water damage.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building measures 37' - 2" x 96' - 2 1/2" and is rectangular in plan.
2. Foundations: Concrete slab on earth.

3. Wall construction, finish and color: Original brick portion has common bond brick bearing walls, painted a beige color. Additions; Frame covered with stucco. Walls of the largest addition are concrete and frame, the base of concrete is approximately 6" thick and 3' - 8" high. A frame wall continues on top of this. The exterior wall is covered with board-and-batten and the interior wall is stuccoed. All additions are painted beige.
4. Structural system, framing; Original brick portion; Brick bearing walls supporting elementary trusses. Largest addition; Wooden frame walls have concrete bases supporting elementary trusses. Smaller additions; Wooden frame walls with flat roofs, slightly inclined.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: Four wooden steps lead to the doorway of the east elevation. Several concrete slabs exist immediately adjacent to the structure, some at egress/ingress points; others have no apparent function.
6. Chimneys: Five metal ventilators (cylindrical), with cone-shaped or circular metal hoods.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Original brick portion; Two wooden doors with wooden jambs on the north elevation, one has been closed, altered because of addition of insulating wall inside. Two wooden doors with wooden jambs at east wall of room, one to office addition, one closed, altered. West elevation has a large opening with a sliding wooden door with some metal hardware. Large opening at south end of room has been closed, stuccoed over. The east walls of both additions have sliding wooden doors with metal hardware.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Original brick portion has double-hung wooden windows, jambs and sills. All double-hung windows in the insulated room have been closed to facilitate thickening of the walls. Additions; Double-hung wooden windows, jambs and sills. Wooden frame awning windows open into the room in the Milk Arrival and Testing room.
8. Roof:
  - a. Original brick portion; Simple pitched roof, plank sheathing, tar-papered. Largest addition; Simple pitched roof, plank sheathing, asbestos shingles. Monitor roof atop this roof has wooden shakes to cover planks. Smaller additions; Flat built-up roofs, tarred.



- b. Cornice, eaves: Original brick portion has a brick parapet with a decorative brick cap of two courses. The lower course is running bond, the upper course is made of headers. The parapet is lower on the long side of the building. The high parapet at the building's short side masks the roof trusses. A curved portion of the parapet running from the high side to the low parapet reconciles the two different heights of the parapet.
  - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Monitor roof on large addition has four awning-hung windows along each side.
  - d. General note on roofs: The ridge of the roof on the largest addition continues the axis of the ridge of the original brick structure's roof.
- C. Description of the Interior:
- 1. Floor plans: The original brick building has been added to and subdivided in several stages. From the Martin Street entrance, one enters the Refrigerator Room, a room with thick walls, itself an alteration to the original structure. In the wall of the Refrigerator Room there is a door to the office addition. In the office addition, there is a small bathroom and a door to outside. In the south wall of the Refrigerator Room, there are two openings, both leading to the Packaging and Processing Room which occupies the remainder of the space in the original brick building. In the east wall of this room there is a door to the outside and several windows that have been closed because of an addition. In the west wall of the Packaging and Processing Room is a large freight door which faces the railroad tracks, and in the south wall of this room, a large opening has been closed and a smaller one created at the extreme west portion of the wall. This opening leads to the Processing Room that once contained the vats. In the east wall of this room, there is an entrance to the Milk Sales Room, and in the west wall, there is a door to outside. The south wall has no doors or windows. One room, the Milk Arrival and Testing Room, is not accessible from any of the room described, but is reached from its own door from the outside.
  - 2. Stairways: No interior stairways. Two concrete steps lead from the original brick portion to the office addition.
  - 3. Flooring: Concrete throughout, except in the office addition which has 3 1/2" tongue-and-groove flooring, and the Milk Arrival and Testing Room which is floored both in concrete and random planks greater than 9 1/2" in width.
  - 4. Walls and ceiling finish: Original brick portion; Insulated room, wooden tongue-and-groove sheathing, plywood sheathing on

walls and ceiling. Large addition; stucco wall above concrete wall. Board planks on ceiling. Small addition; Stucco and wooden sheathing, wooden tongue-and-groove on walls. No ceiling finish, underside of roof sheathing shows.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Wooden frames, jambs and door.
- b. Windows: Metal louvered openings between Milk Arrival and Testing Room and Processing Room (largest addition).

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: Building faces north in industrial-use neighborhood. Adjacent is the main line of the Southern Pacific Railway in the oldest section of Gilroy. The creamery is located one block east of the major north-south street, Monterey Street, and adjacent to the residential zone to the east.

Prepared by R. David Schaaf  
Architectural Supervisor  
Historic American Buildings Survey  
July 1979

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the County of Santa Clara. The 1979 summer project, the last of a three-year recording project in Santa Clara County, was completed under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS; Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect; and Sibyl McCormac Groff, Project Supervisor (Columbia University); with David Schaaf, Architectural Foreman (Carnegie Mellon University); Jan Cigliano (Oberlin College); and student architects William Coppa (University of Virginia), Jon Lourie (University of Maryland), Anne Munly (Princeton University), John Murphy (Texas Tech University), and Matthew Poe (Virginia Polytechnic University), at the HABS field office in Santa Clara, California. The drawings were edited in the HABS Washington Office in the summer of 1979 by architect David Schaaf. The historical and architectural data were edited by Jan Cigliano and Denys Peter Myers, architectural historians on the HABS staff in 1979 and 1981. Photographs were taken by photographer Jane Lidz in the summer of 1980.